

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 12, 2013

Agenda Item: 2014-15 and 2016-17 Quota Range for Helena Urban Deer Management

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

In 2003, the Montana Legislature authorized cities to create plans to control wildlife to address public health and safety within city limits. Such plans must be approved by the FWP Commission. The City of Helena subsequently developed an Urban Deer Management Plan seeking to initially remove 350 deer to achieve an objective of 25 deer per square mile. FWP completed a third programmatic environmental assessment in 2009 that confirmed objectives and methods relative to urban deer management in Helena. Within the plan, any take/removal of deer requires approval on an annual basis. To date, a total of 670 deer have been removed, including 140 removed during the latest removal effort in 2013. FWP does not contribute staff or resources to actual removal efforts. Any quotas do not apply to individual deer removed under urgent public-safety situations.

Survey data are collected and analyzed annually in October. Subsequently, the city, in cooperation with the local FWP biologist, establishes a level of take, which is presented to the F&W Commission as a proposal in November and finalized in December, when take efforts are authorized to begin. The take authorization last year was valid through Dec. 31, 2013, with a no-take period extending from April 1 through Nov. 14, 2013.

Implementing a quota range is in line with the process and procedure FWP uses for huntable populations of wildlife, and approval for take would still be under FWP oversight. A quota range will help expedite the process, which is much needed. Annually, there is time crunch beginning in early October to get the survey completed, the data entered and analyzed, projections calculated and a proposal to the Commission such that the Helena Police Department is able to commence culling after the December Commission meeting. The information is typically delivered to the Commission days before the November meeting, and in some years, this has been delayed to the December meeting. Thus, the City of Helena cannot begin removing deer until after the January Commission meeting, which makes it difficult to reach the targeted number of removals in some years, especially if the target is greater than 150 or if the winter is mild. Furthermore, FWP now has five years of experience managing urban deer in Helena, which can be applied to properly administer the removal and to establish an appropriate quota range.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The City of Helena conducted extensive public involvement in developing its plan and the previous urban deer EAs. FWP provided separate 30-day public comment periods. Public comment on this proposal will extend through 5 p.m. Jan. 24, 2014.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposal may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission discussion.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt the proposed quota range for take of urban deer by the City of Helena as presented by city staff and FWP.